

HOW TO... Keep your PC running well

Every PC needs regular check-ups to keep things running smoothly. Matt Chapman explains how SiSoftware Sandra Lite can keep your PC in peak condition

ON THE COVER DISC For your PC to run at its best, there's countless drivers and settings that need attention. Make life easy by enlisting the help of some good diagnostic software.

SiSoftware Sandra Lite looks at every aspect of your PC so you can give it the regular tune-up it needs. It provides information about your computer's processor, chipset, video adaptor, ports, sound card, memory, network, Windows internals and more. The Lite version is included on this month's cover disc; you'll also find more information in our feature on page 138.

Below we use Sandra to check a single PC, but you can use the software to test your home network remotely and even diagnose any PDAs and smartphones that are connected.

1 Once you launch the software, double-click the Performance Tune Up icon. You can follow the steps in the wizard to get a summary of your computer's performance. Click the green arrow button to continue to the next screen, or use Ctrl-N to move through the wizard. You need to do this once you have followed the instructions for each screen in the wizard.

2 Use the drop-down menu to decide how you want the final report to appear. You can choose to view it onscreen, have it printed or save it to your computer for future viewing. Click the arrow button to continue. If you choose to save the report, you can select a format to save it in; a text file or a HTML web page, for instance. Use the drop-down menu to make your choice and click the arrow button again.

3 The report that is generated will already have been named, but you can change this. Click in the File box and type something more practical, maybe adding the date of the test. To choose where it is saved on your computer, click the button with three dots. This opens the standard Save window. Choose an appropriate folder for the file or create a new one by clicking on the icon of a folder with a star on it. Enter a name for the file in the File Name box at the bottom of the Save window. Click the Save button to continue.

4 As the individual tests take place, each one receives a Yes next to its field as it is ticked off. The green bar at the top also moves along to the right of the screen to show the overall progress of the scan.

Once it is complete, the test window closes. You can view the report created to view the performance-enhancing tips the test has uncovered. These are based on your PC's current hardware and software and the tips will help you optimise the setup of your PC. For example, the video software for our PC was out of date, the monitor refresh rate was set too low and we needed to check the firewall settings to make sure all our network adaptors were protected.

5 When you started the program in Step 1, you double-clicked on Performance Tune Up. If you go back to this window, you'll see an icon under Wizard Modules called Combined Performance. Its icon looks like a wizard's hat. Double-click on this to start the test. It allows

you to compare quickly the performance results for your whole system against a set of similar computers. There's no easy-to-see guide to show you how far through the test is, so be patient as it can take a while to complete.

The results are displayed in the form of a convergence matrix. This is a pentagon, which represents the five areas tested: memory, arithmetic, storage, network and multimedia. The reference system is represented in the background as a blue pentagon. Once it has completed the test, your computer is displayed as a red pentagon in front of this. If your PC is up to scratch, you won't be able to see any of the blue pentagon, only red. In the picture for this step you can see what a poorly performing computer looks like. Only the network aspect was up to scratch; all other areas were deficient.

This test allows you to see any areas where your system is deficient and what needs to be changed to ensure full overlap of the pentagon. It is a useful test if you are thinking about upgrading components in your PC.

6 SiSoftware Sandra Lite also comes equipped with a number of individual information modules. Scroll down the main Sandra Lite screen to see a full list. These give you information about whichever system part they are named after. For example, you can double-click the Drives Information icon to see details about your computer's different drives. Double-click Windows Information to find out which elements of your operating system are installed and running. 

